



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, CHE
Commissioner of Health

Health Department

Administration

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653 phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990
web site: www.milwaukee.gov/health

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Media Contact: Raquel M. Filmanowicz
414-286-3175 Office
414-708-5367 Cell

“KEEP YOUR SHORTY ALIVE” City of Milwaukee & Lena’s Food Market Unite to Reduce Infant Mortality

Customers learn about infant mortality prevention and enter drawings to win \$300 gift cards for free diapers

Mayor Tom Barrett, Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker and Greg Martin of Lena’s Food Markets announced today a new infant mortality prevention campaign geared toward the African-American community in Milwaukee. The “Keep Your Shorty Alive” campaign, a four week in-store promotion, will deliver culturally competent safe sleep, anti-smoking and prenatal care messages to increase awareness of the causes of high rates of infant mortality within the African-American community.

Milwaukee has high infant mortality rates throughout the city, and some of the highest rates were in zip codes where a Lena’s Food Market is located. “This innovative campaign gave us an excellent opportunity to partner with a local grocer whose customer base is predominantly African American,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “We need to increase awareness of infant mortality within this specific population and Lena’s has a proven track record in serving the African-American community.”

Each week the four Lena’s Food Markets will feature a different set of facts related to preventing infant mortality. These facts will be placed at random throughout the stores including the Baby Food and Baby Needs aisles, which will always contain infant mortality prevention data. Customers who complete short quizzes derived from that week’s set of facts will be eligible to enter weekly drawings for free diapers and gift certificates donated by a local retailer.

The first weekly drawing will be held on Friday, April 21st, and will be for a \$300 gift card to be used for diapers. There will be two final drawings at the end of the campaign at each store. Winners will be drawn from the list of people who previously completed quizzes during the campaign. The featured prize is a Pack and Play set, which has been donated by the East Capitol Wal-mart® in Milwaukee.

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“Lena’s Food Markets have been a driving force for economic success and community partnership in Milwaukee,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “They are an ideal partner for this program to educate parents and family members about the alarming infant mortality rate in our city and what they can do to ensure a healthy and bright start for every Milwaukee child.”

The City of Milwaukee’s infant mortality rate (IMR=number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births) remains very high. While the White infant mortality rate in the last 15 years has improved, the African-American and Hispanic infant mortality rates have fluctuated but have not improved. Milwaukee’s 12.0 IMR in 2004 remains significantly higher than the National IMR of 6.9 in 2003ⁱ.

Currently, African-American infants are over three times more likely to die in their first year of life than White infants, which is a greater disparity than in 2003 when African-American infants were less than three times more likely to die than White infants.

Causes of deaths such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which can usually be prevented if an infant sleeps on their back, is almost five times more common among African-American infants in Milwaukee than White infants, and almost three times higher than the national African-American rate.

In 2004 for every 1,000 African American babies that were born in Milwaukee, 19 did not live to see their first birthday. This 19/1000 rate is worse than the rate in developing countries like Sri-Lanka, Ukraine and Tonga.

Lena's Food Market was established over 35 years ago by Beezlee and Lena Martin who operated their neighborhood store on West North Avenue in Milwaukee. Currently Lena's Foods is one of Milwaukee's community institutions. Lena’s has four Milwaukee locations:

- 4030 N. Teutonia Ave.
- 2322 W. Oak St.
- 4623 W. Burleigh St.
- 3334 N. Holton St.

The “Keep Your Shorty Alive” campaign is a collaborative creative partnership between the City of Milwaukee Health Department and Strive Media Institute. Strive Media Institute is a non-profit program that provides 13 to 18 year old at-risk high school youth with the opportunity to gain real-world knowledge and experience in the fields of mass communications.

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ⁱ National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 53, No. 15, February 28, 2005